

SINGLE POLARIZATION FIBER LASER

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for obtaining electromagnetic
5 radiation having a single polarization from a fiber laser.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Fiber optic lasers naturally oscillate in both available electromagnetic radiation
polarizations. However, single polarization laser output is required in a large proportion
10 of laser systems. Components that use polarized electromagnetic radiation include
heterodyne detectors, most modulators, frequency doublers and shifters, and many
amplifiers. Thus, the ability to generate single polarization fiber laser output is critical to
most applications for fiber laser technology, including but certainly not limited to laser
communications, laser radar for military and automotive applications, and active imaging
15 systems. However, presently, no suitable method exists for polarizing fiber laser output
that does not incur splicing losses between dissimilar fibers or require high-risk, labor-
intensive fabrication steps

20 A number of techniques have been proposed and/or demonstrated for making a fiber laser
oscillate in only one polarization. One such method requires splicing single polarization
fiber onto the doped fiber. However, presently available single polarization fibers do not
match the parameters of the doped fibers used for the laser gain; numerical aperture and

core diameter, for example, are considerably different. Thus, the internal splice between the dissimilar fibers creates undesired loss.

In another technique the doped fiber is polished to its core and then metallic or
5 waveguided loss of one of the polarizations is introduced into the fiber. However, this approach is labor-intensive and not cost-effective, and such techniques present a high risk of breaking the fiber laser.

Another proposed technique, though never successfully demonstrated, is to use the
10 natural birefringence of a fiber grating by using two fiber segments spliced back together after rotating one segment by 90°. However, this proposed technique is labor-intensive, is not cost-effective, and presents a high risk of fiber breakage.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15 The present invention provides a method and apparatus for achieving single polarization output from a fiber laser that is low cost, comparatively simple, and presents minimal risk to the doped fiber. More specifically, the present invention provides a method and apparatus for generating single polarization fiber output by which a tightly looped fiber grating reflector is formed within the fiber laser itself. As noted above, a fiber grating
20 has natural birefringence. This birefringence creates a differential loss between the two available polarizations. The present invention permits formation of this grating within a single fiber, and thus no splicing between components is required. The differential loss between the polarizations is further accentuated by tight looping of the fiber at the grating

site. A modified technique is utilized for writing the Bragg grating within the fiber which, unlike currently used procedures, does not require the step of stripping the outer coating and the step of exposing the fiber to high intensity pulsed ultraviolet light, both of which mechanically weaken the fiber. Thus, upon formation of the grating, a loop can be
5 created in the fiber without significant risk of breakage.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates the effects of creating a Bragg grating in a fiber laser and introducing a tight curve at the grating site on the polarization of the laser output.

FIG. 2 depicts a non-destructive method for creating a Bragg grating in a fiber laser in order to polarize the laser output.

FIG. 3 depicts the utilization of the looped polarizer according to the present invention in
15 a fiber laser.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is useful for providing a method and apparatus for generating single polarization laser output from a fiber optic laser. The following description is
20 presented to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to make and use the invention, which may be incorporated in the context of a variety of applications. Various modifications to the preferred embodiment, as well as a variety of uses in different applications will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Notably, the general principles defined herein

may be applied to other embodiments; thus, the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiments shown, but is to be accorded the widest scope consistent with the principles and novel features disclosed herein.

5 In the present invention, the natural birefringence of the Bragg grating within the fiber laser serves to create a differential loss between the two polarizations of the laser output. In a preferred embodiment of this invention, the fiber laser is curved into a tight loop at the position of the grating. Tight curvature at the grating site serves to increase the differential loss between the two polarizations. **FIG. 1** illustrates the affect of including a
10 looped grating on the polarization of the laser output. Under ideal conditions, the natural output **100** of the fiber laser is converted essentially completely to a singularly polarized output **102** using a looped Bragg grating **104** according to the present invention.

The present invention takes advantage of a non-destructive technique for writing Bragg
15 gratings within fiber lasers. Current procedures for writing gratings within fibers require first mechanically stripping the outer coating from the fiber followed by exposure to high power, pulsed far ultraviolet light (~244 nm). In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the fiber is exposed instead to light in the 330 nm range. In this wavelength range, the polymer coating of the fiber is transparent and thus can remain intact.

20 Furthermore, exposure at this wavelength takes advantage of the photosensitivity window of the fiber core, which is centered at 330 nm.

An example of a method for polarizing the output from a fiber laser according to the present invention is shown in **FIG. 2**. In this preferred embodiment of the present invention, Bragg gratings are fabricated in a neodymium-doped fiber **200** with ~20 mole percent germanium oxide in the core using the 334-nm line of a continuous wave argon laser **202**. Laser writing power is 50-200 mW. The laser beam **204** is expanded by a cylindrical lens **206** to approximately 1.5 cm, and a second cylindrical lens **208** with focal length ~ 3 cm focuses the beam onto the fiber core. A phase mask **210** with period ~ 730 nm is placed in front of the fiber to impress a grating into the fiber core with a Bragg resonance at ~1060 nm. A thin (200-micron) glass slide **212** is placed between the fiber and the phase mask to protect the phase mask surface from possible debris from the polymer coating. As monitored using a halogen lamp light source and an optical spectrum analyzer, gratings having 10% Bragg intensity reflection can be obtained in 20 seconds to 2 minutes. The resultant grating can then be curved at the site of the grating to introduce differential loss between the available polarizations.

An example of the utilization of the looped polarizer of the present invention is illustrated in **FIG. 3**. In this example, the Bragg grating **300** has 15% reflectivity and is written at one end of a 3 meter long neodymium fiber laser **302**, and a 4 % reflector **304** is positioned at the opposite end of the fiber. The laser system is coupled to a pump **306** through a coupler **308** at the same end of the fiber as the grating. In the present example, formation of a loop of approximately 1/4" diameter at the grating site completely suppresses lasing in one polarization while maintaining it in the other as measured at the output site **310**.